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SIPDIS

FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

SENSITIVE

DEPT PASS USAID FOR ADMINISTRATOR NATSIOS
NAIROBI PASS PIERSON
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [CF](#)

SUBJECT: CONGO/B: CENTRAL AFRICAN HEADS OF STATE ENVIRONMENT
SUMMIT; CHIRAC ATTENDS, TREATY SIGNED

1. (U) Summary: The Second Summit of the Central African Heads of State on Conservation and the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems, held in Brazzaville on February 4 and 5, was marked by the signature of a treaty that strengthens the role of the Central Africa Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and expands its membership to include Burundi, Rwanda, and Sao Tome and Principe. While the treaty calls for a financing mechanism for COMIFAC member states and a suite of environmental activities known as the Plan de Convergence, heads of state also appealed to the international community to provide increased aid, including through such innovative mechanisms as carbon trading and debt for nature swaps. The USG was invited to attend as a member of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). In a side event, the French hosted a day of discussion on the terms of reference for their two-year term as CBFP facilitator, a role they assumed from the U.S. in December 2004. The French have indicated they will put the accent on dialogue, coordination and close cooperation with the CBFP partners. In a key address to the Summit, French President Chirac urged the Central African leaders to focus on good governance and also briefly touched on the need to address illegal logging. The USG delegation urged Summit leaders to renew their commitment to the principles of African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) and to reinforce measures to monitor and control the illegal trade in wildlife/bushmeat. COMIFAC also announced the name of the new FAO-financed co-facilitator, Raymond Bitikan, but we understand Bitikan has not yet accepted the post. Of note, the Italian representative announced debt relief of 800 million Euros to COMIFAC countries. There was a French-led CBFP partner meeting held on the fringes of the Summit February 3. USAID Africa Assistant Administrator Lloyd Pierson led the USG delegation and made key points on the separation between CBFP and COMIFAC and stressed the importance of conservation management, AFLEG, and environment policy. End Summary.

COMIFAC Treaty and Declaration

2. (U) Following two days of speeches lauding the progress that the Central African member states of the Central Africa Forest Commission (COMIFAC) made in concerting their efforts to improve environmental conservation of the Congo Basin, the heads of state of the Republic of Congo, Cameroon, CAR, DROC, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, and Sao Tome and Principe, joined by representatives of the heads of state of Rwanda and Burundi, signed a Treaty February 5 on the Conservation and the Sustainable Management of the Forest Ecosystems of Central Africa. The Treaty reaffirms their commitment to the 1999 Yaounde Declaration, good environment and biodiversity practices outlined in the 2000 Plan de Convergence. Angola, one of the expected signatories, did not sign the Treaty at the Summit. The Treaty, which will come into force when it is ratified by at least four countries, commits the signatories to establishing financing mechanisms and treating conservation, sustainable forest management and environmental protection as national priorities.

3. (U) In their addresses to the Summit, the respective heads of state uniformly called on the international community to step up their financial contributions to the conservation of the region's ecosystem through contributions to COMIFAC, debt for nature swaps, or other innovative mechanisms. These calls were reiterated in a Heads of State Declaration issued at the close of the Summit. President Bongo was the only Head of State whose speech focused on the need for debt forgiveness by developed nations in order for the region's countries to use more resources for environmental conservation.

Chirac's Speech

14. (U) French President Jacques Chirac, who was the undisputed star of the show, used the occasion to highlight his interest in and concern for the Central African environment, but put the emphasis on actions the Central African states must take at national and regional levels to ensure good governance and effective forest laws, sustainable forest management, and the creation of more protected areas. He made a passing reference to USG CBFP facilitation as he noted what France's three main goals during its facilitation tenure will include:

- reinforcing dialogue, coordination and cooperation among all actors in the Congo Basin, including the public and private sector;
- combating illegal commerce in tropical timber through the reinforcement of mechanisms of surveillance and control;
- reinforcing regional and national capacities necessary for sustainable management of the Congo Basin, particularly through training, administration, and the codification and implementation of forest policies.

USG Participation at the CBFP Session

15. (U) In their respective addresses to the Summit, USG delegation chief Lloyd Pierson (USAID Assistant Administrator for Africa) and the Ambassador underscored the distinct and separate natures of COMIFAC and the CBFP, stressing that the CBFP is and must remain an informal and relatively unstructured alliance of like-minded countries, international and local organizations (including COMIFAC) and the private sector. Pierson in both the CBFP Feb. 3 and COMIFAC Feb 4 ministerial meetings on the margins of the Summit stated in his remarks the imperative of promoting the sustainable management of the Congo Basin's forests and wildlife while also seeking to improve the lives of the region's inhabitants. He highlighted in detail the key points of AFLEG, the list of actions of the 1999 Yaounde Declaration and the President's Initiative Against Illegal Logging (PIAIL). The Assistant USAID Administrator also noted that while the COMIFAC Plan de Convergence is a useful reference point for Partner activities, the USG strongly believes that CBFP partners must have the latitude to determine the nature and extent of their contributions to the region's environment in a sovereign manner. Both Pierson and the Ambassador called on the Central African states to pay scrupulous attention to commitments they made during the October 2003 Yaounde African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) ministerial, including commitments to inventory, monitor and control the illegal traffic in bushmeat/wildlife.

16. (U) A large number of CBFP partners attended a February 3 session chaired by the French Ambassador in charge of Summit preparations, Gerard Cros introduce the new French CBFP facilitator, Denys Gauer, and reviewed the terms of reference (TOR) for France's term of facilitation. The USG delegation intervened early in the session to urge that the TOR and a proposed Cooperation Framework make clear the separate and distinct nature of CBFP and COMIFAC. The USG delegation also noted that it opposed any notion of a central funding mechanism for CBFP, supported the concept of an informal mechanism for consultation among partners, and asked for a clear recommitment to the principles of AFLEG. The USG also raised concerns about a proposed Consultative Committee as overly-bureaucratic and noted concerns about the terms of reference for an African CBFP "co-facilitator." The French were amenable to our suggestions and those of other partners and also made clear that the Consultative Committee would be voluntary, serving only as a means to facilitate information exchange among partners. The notion of the Consultative Committee was retained and our points on separate and distinct and AFLEG were included in a final TOR and the TOR was adopted by consensus. Other elements of the French TOR include the following:

- Elaboration of the CBFP website;
- Organization of a voluntary working group to examine potential finance mechanisms that could be used to support the Plan de Convergence;
- Strengthening of the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat through appointment of an African co-facilitator (although this was a bit of a deception since it appears that the French are supporting ROC candidate Raymund Bitikan from CAR, and Bitikan is saying he has not accepted the job) and other technical assistance;
- Improvement of governance through the harmonization of laws and forest regulations with AFLEG and the promotion of voluntary agreements within the framework of the EU's FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) initiative;
- Regional and national promotion of CBFP and COMIFAC conservation activities.

17. (SBU) Comment: The Central African Heads of State noted their renewed commitment to good governance, including AFLEG, as well as the pursuit of concrete actions on the

ground and the vigorous implementation of their Plan de Convergence. Whether they turn their words into actions remains to be seen. Many of the international community CBFP partners present at the Summit privately expressed skepticism about entrusting further funds to COMIFAC, which most see as a stalking horse for Congolese Forest Minister Henri Djombo's political ambitions. There is also concern that COMIFAC still needs to do more and improve as an organization. Despite Gabonese Minister Doumba serving as current COMIFAC chair, ROC Minister Djombo was clearly running the show. The Germans, French and some others, however, remain committed to strengthening COMIFAC's institutional capacities through limited inputs of technical support. The more impressive speeches were given by Cameroon President Biya and DRC President Kabila. Neither Chirac nor anyone in his delegation made mention of financial commitments. On the brighter side, there remains widespread support for CBFP and its multiple activities, although not all partners see CBFP and COMIFAC as "separate and distinct." Most participants left the Summit with a strong sense that the French take their new role as facilitator seriously and with a strong commitment to working in an amicable and cooperative manner with the U.S. and other partners, although there remain differences on "separate and distinct" for COMIFAC issues and terms of reference for the African co-facilitator.

18. (U) Assistant Administrator Pierson departed before he could clear this cable.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

110. (U) Brazzaville Embassy Office - Sanders.
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